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Religious Tolerance and Coexistence: Pluralist Dimensions in Ibn-e-Safi's Life and Writings

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Abstract

Ibn-e-Safi is one of the prominent literary figures of South Asia and has a special place among the writers of mystery fiction in modern Urdu prose. His *Jāsūsī Duniyā* and *Imrān Series* are responsible for developing lasting characters such as Colonel Faridi, Ali Imran, Juliana, Captain Hameed, and Joseph. Although his life and contributions to Urdu literature have successfully held the attention of scholars but due consideration has not been accorded to the religious aspect of his works. This paper employs the biographical approach to highlight the pluralistic dimensions of his life and writings. It identifies the religious discourses found in the intra-character dialogues of his *Imrān Series* novels in order to explore his religious views. Further, it argues in favor of his strong support for interreligious harmony and peace and for the promotion of peaceful coexistence among the adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, it is noted that he opposed Zionism as he maintained that its philosophy does not promote peace and harmony. In this world of perpetual change where religious, racial, and communal violence is so common, where religious dissent has already caused enormous human and material loss, and where rigid human behavior creates hatred and dissent, the study of his *Imrān Series* teaches tolerance and helps to identify elements disturbing the peace of the society.

Keywords: Ibn-e-Safi, *Imrān Series*, Islam, interfaith harmony

Life and Mission of Ibn-e-Safi

Born as Asrar Ahmad, in Allahabad on the 26th July 1928,¹ Ibn-e-Safi is distinguished among the pioneers of detective novels in modern Urdu prose. In order to have a better understanding of his ideas and thought about religious pluralism and coexistence, it is imperative to understand him first as what contributes to the knowledge of his motives behind writing about religion. On what grounds he supported religious pluralism while residing in a fledgling Islamic state. Therefore, his biography is presented to highlight these aspects of his life.

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¹It is also pointed out by some writers that he was born in the month of April of the same year. See, Muhammad Arif Iqbal, "Ibn-i Šafī aik Nazar Main [Ibn-e-Safi in a Glance]," in *Ibn-i Šafī kā Adbī Naşb-ul 'Aēn: Taḥqīqī wa Tanqīdī Muṭāli'ah [Ibn-e-Safi's Literary Mission: A Critical Analysis]*, ed. Mushtaq Ahmad Qureshi (Lahore: 'Ilm-o 'Irfān Publishers, 2018), 18.

His father, Şafiullah, was a worker in a vending company and his mother, Nazīrān Bībī, was a housewife. Breaking their ties with Hinduism, his forefathers joined the Muslim community long before Rājā Vāsheshar Dayyāl Singh accepted Islam. According to a famous writer Mujawar Hussain, Safi would say that “you people are Muslims by default whereas we became Muslims by choice. Our forefathers accepted Islam after understanding it.”² Being a Kayastha,³ his family members were skilful in the field of education and administration. His father was an avid reader and having plenty of novels and stories in his home. However, this literature remained a forbidden fruit for Safi because it was Şafiullah who did not want his child to immerse in it.⁴ Perhaps he feared that it would reduce the interest and intrinsic motivation of his son for formal education. But the support of Nazīrān Bībī won Safi’s access to this literature which later proved to be a fortune for his mental growth and professional career. Simultaneously, she did not forget to put a focusing lens on his education.

Safi's interest in reading made him a polymath who benefited from the literature of both the East and the West. He would read Muhammad Husain Jah's (1899) *Tilism-i Hōshrubā* and Henry Rider Haggard's (1856-1925) *She*⁵ with equal interest. Consequently, his inner self forced him to write his thoughts at the age of ten. He had a gifted pen which proved its power in seventh grade when he wrote his very first story for a magazine, *Shāhid Weekly*. The story was so impressive for the editor that he started taking Safi as a professional writer. The following years witnessed a mushrooming growth of his prose and poetic works. Meanwhile, he secured his admission to the Ewing Christian College (former Allahabad College),⁶ established by a famous missionary, Arthur Henry Ewing (1864-1912). In order to complete his B.A., he joined Allahabad University in 1947. However,

²Muhammad Usman Ali, "Ibn-e-Safi: Sawānḥī Ishāry awr Mazāḥ Nigārī [Ibn Safi: Biographical Gestures and Humor]," *Urdu Research Journal*, no. 7 (2016): 32.

³Kayastha was a group of well-educated people who mostly served as scribes, courtiers, and keepers of public record in India. Thus, Safi's family was among those few Kayasthas who converted to Islam and formed Kayastha Muslim community. See, Hayden J. Bellenoit, *The Formation of the Colonial State in India: Scribes, Paper and Taxes, 1760-1860* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 46.

⁴Ibn-e-Safi, "Main Nay Likhnā Kesay Shurū‘ Kiyā [How I Started Writing]," in *Bhayyānak Ādmī [The Dreadful Man]*, vol. 2 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 3.

⁵According to Usman Ali, Safi used to read the translated works of Haggard. See, Ali, "Ibn-e-Safi: Sawānḥī Ishāry awr Mazāḥ Nigārī [Ibn Safi: Biographical Gestures and Humor]," 32. However, Jamal Rizvi (Shakeel Jamali), a friend of his, writes that Safi would borrow English novels from him when he was just in the 9th grade. See Shakeel Jamali, *Yādwōn kā Ujālā [The Dawn of Memories]*, Jāsūsī Duniyā (Allahabad: Asrār Publications, 1993), 29. Rizvi's statement seems more plausible as he was a close friend of Safi. Moreover, the way Safi quoted western writers in his novels indicates that he had a working knowledge of English language.

⁶Ibn-e-Safi, "Baqalam Khud [With my Own Pen]," in *Khofnāk ‘Imārat [The House Of Fear]*, vol. 1 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 3.

the Partition of India disrupted his education and silenced his pen also.⁷ It took him a whole year to start writing again as he worked as an editor for Nakhat Publications in 1948.

1.1. Respect of Law and Religion

What affected him most were the pogroms of 1947 which stressed his whole personality. After a thorough analysis, he concluded that people would remain savages unless they had been taught to respect the law.⁸ Therefore, he thought on serious issues to make his fellows realize that the survival of humanity was possible only by the obedience of the law. Although he does not explain what he meant by "law," the interpretations of later authors significantly clarify this point. For example, Mushtaq Ahmad Qureshi, a prominent journalist, comments that Safi's aim is to teach people about the sanctity of law. He desired a society that could follow *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path).⁹ It is noteworthy that *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is an Arabic term mentioned in the very first *surah*¹⁰ of the Holy Qur'ān. This term is used to mention the path of those on whom Allah bestowed His favor. This path is Islam¹¹ according to Ibn-i-'Abbās, a companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW). It shows that Safi's understanding of the law was not just limited to the man-made rules, but he was aiming at something higher. Arif Iqbal, a prominent writer and an authority on Ibn-e-Safi, further elucidates this point. He writes about two types of law. The first, for him, is worldly law which consists of both national and international laws whereas the second is natural¹² or Divine law. Safi, he explains, not only did revere worldly law in his novels but also accorded due respect to Divine law.¹³ Iqbal's opinion, if examined under the light of Safi's writings, seems plausible as the characters of his novels strictly and explicitly uphold both worldly and Divine laws.¹⁴

Regarding his religious intentions, Mujawar Hussain comments that Safi's father was associated with the Barēlwī school of thought whereas his mother was a Deobandī. Most

⁷Ibid., 5.

⁸Ibn-e-Safi, "Main Nay Likhnā Kesay Shurū' Kiyā [How I Started Writing]," 7.

⁹Mushtaq Ahmad Qureshi, "Guftagū [The Dialogue]," in *Ibn-i Ṣafī kā Adbī Naṣb-ul 'Aēn: Taḥqīqī wa Tanqīdī Muṭālī'ah [Ibn-e-Safi's Literary Mission: A Critical Analysis]*, ed. Mushtaq Ahmad Qureshi (Lahore: 'Ilm-o 'irfān Publishers, 2018), 11.

¹⁰Al-Qu'rān, al-Fātiḥah 1:6.

¹¹Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm lil-Ḥāfiz ibn-i Kathīr*, vol. 1 (Riyadh: Dār Al-Tayyibah, 1999), 138.

¹²It should be noted that for Muslims, Islam is *dīn al-fitrah* or natural religion. The Holy Prophet (SAW) mentioned that "Every child born on fitrah. It is his parents who make him a Jew, Christian or Magian." See, M. Ismail Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, vol. 2 (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, 1997), 267.

¹³Muhammad Arif Iqbal, *Ibn-i Ṣafī kā Adbī Naṣb-ul 'Aēn: Taḥqīqī wa Tanqīdī Muṭālī'ah [Ibn Safi's Literary Mission: A Critical Analysis]*, ed. Mushtaq Ahmad Qureshi (Lahore: 'Ilm-o Irfān Publishers, 2018), 36.

¹⁴See, Ibn-e-Safi, "Jahannam kī Raqqāṣah [Dancer of the Hell]," 130.

of his friends belonged to the Shiite sect. Nevertheless, he was just a Muslim—a man who knows how to keep himself away from sectarianism. For Hussain, this very quality earned him respect among the people of different schools of thought.¹⁵ Similarly, quoting relevant passages from his novels, Seyyed Khāwajah Mu‘īn al-Dīn adds that Safi did not have any religious bias for his fellow countrymen. Tolerance was his distinctive virtue.¹⁶ Comparing Safi with other detective novelists, Khurram Ali Shafiq, a prominent writer, concludes “Being a reformer, he (Safi) was the ideological successor of Syed Ahmad Khan, Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar, and Allama Iqbal.”¹⁷ He discouraged sectarian and religious disputes and advocated a balanced way of life upholding the sovereignty of Allah.¹⁸

His novels show that he was not a proponent of secular philosophies. He discouraged a Godless society¹⁹ and advised to bury all “isms.”²⁰ He thought these “isms” were the causes of certain consequences. Sometimes, a certain problem of any “ism” became the reason for the emergence of a new “ism.” Islam, for him, was the only religion that was final and could be followed as a complete code of life. For this, he advised people to develop honesty at the individual level.²¹ Moreover, he also wrote that “monarchy stopped Islamic social evolution, otherwise the world need not confront with the various types of isms.”²² In other words, he disliked monarchy as well as modern philosophies such as Marxism, Communism, and Hippieism.²³ Thus, it can be concluded that he was against the secular philosophies and a strong supporter of the Islamic way of life. This does not mean that he was against other religions in the world. For example, in 1960, due to an enormous burden, he was struck by schizophrenia. His admirers, regardless of their religion, color, or race, showed their love for him through their letters. Safi also thanked them through the very first novel he wrote after his recovery in 1963. He especially pointed out that he felt

¹⁵Iqbal, "Ibn-i Safi aik Nazar Main [Ibn-e-Safi in a Glance]," 20n2.

¹⁶Seyyed Khāwajah Mu‘īn al-Dīn, "Ibn-i Safi kē Nāwlōn main Akhlāqiyyat aur Insānī Aqdār [Ethical Values in the Novels of Ibn-e-Safi]," in *Ibn-i Safi: Mission aur Adbī Karnāmah [Ibn-e-Safi Mission and Achievement]*, ed. Muhammad Arif Iqbal (Delhi: Urdu Book Review, 2013), 449.

¹⁷Khurram Ali Shafique, *Rānā Palace* (Karachi: Fadhli Sons Private Limited, 2011), 19.

¹⁸Ibn-e-Safi, "Pāglōn kī Anjuman [Association of Lunatics]," in *Pāglōn kī Anjuman [Association of Lunatics]*, vol. 17 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 94.

¹⁹Ibn-e-Safi, "Jahannam kī Raqqāṣah [Dancer of the Hell]," 130.

²⁰Ibn-e-Safi, "Imrān kī Aghwā [Imran's Abduction]," in *Bōghā*, vol. 29 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 131.

²¹Rashid Ashraf, "Bayād-i Ibn-i Safi [Diary of Ibn-e-Safi]," *N'yē Ufq*, August 2010, 67.

²²Ibn-e-Safi, "Khaṭarnāk Ungliyān [Dangerous Fingers]," in *Khaṭarnāk Ungliyān [Dangerous Fingers]*, vol. 32 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 198.

²³Regarding Hippieism, he said that it is the alternative name of uselessness. See, his comment in the preface of *Ashtray House*. Ibn-e-Safi, "Ashtray House," in *Mowt kī Hāth [The Hand of Death]*, vol. 18 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 263.

honored whenever he thought about the prayers made for him in mosques, churches, and *gurdwaras*.²⁴

1.2. Promotion of Unerotic Literature

A transformation in his life took place when, during a discussion, an elderly person shared his views about the eroticism in Urdu novels. He said that Urdu literature would not sell without erotica. Safi countered this argument and started thinking to introduce something that could revive the glory of Urdu literature.²⁵ Thus later resulted in the creation of *Jāsūsī Duniyā*, a series of spy novels which he started publishing in 1952 by the Nakhat Publications. He was sure that eroticism was becoming popular in Urdu literature because people were not ready to write on other serious topics. Through his writings, he proved that he was right in his judgment. After the publication of his detective novels, people turned their attention towards this very genre of fiction. At the same time, through his novels, he did not forget to discourage sexually stimulating writings.²⁶ Especially, he criticized the magazines and newspapers which he thought were encouraging erotica to promote the so-called "culture."²⁷ As far as the application of the anti-erotica policy in his own books is concerned, I found only two sentences in his one hundred and twenty novels of *Imrān Series* which can be considered erotic especially in the Indo-Pakistani context. For example, Safi writes "pretty girls should not eat much otherwise they will get out of shape. It will disturb the ratio of 36-24-36."²⁸ Leaving aside the authenticity of such lines, it can safely be concluded that his novels were free from erotica.

2. Depiction of World Religions in Imrān Series

Born to the Muslim parents, Safi held the Islamic faith. Still, he did not forget to discuss the ideas of other religious folds in his writings. Quoting relevant dialogues from the novels of Safi, Ashraf pointed out that he was not a religious preacher. He was a sort of "liberal" writer who aimed at teaching the respect of law to his readers. He was faithful to the basic Islamic principles but did not try to impose his viewpoint on others.²⁹ Although the

²⁴Ibn-e-Safi, "Dērh Matwālē [One-and-a-Half Buddies]," in *Hammabag the Great*, vol. 12 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 240.

²⁵Ibn-e-Safi, "Baqalam Khud [With my Own Pen]," 5.

²⁶Ibn-e-Safi, "Mowt kī Āahat [Sound of Death]," in *Zeroland kī Talāsh [The Search of the Zeroland]*, vol. 31 (II) of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 18; Ibn-e-Safi, "Halākat Khēz [The Deadly]," in *Halākat Khēz [The Deadly]*, vol. 29 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 22; Ibn-e-Safi, "Phīr whī Āawāz [That Voice Again]," in *Singhī kī Wāpsī [Return of Singhī]*, vol. 19 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 114.

²⁷Ibn-e-Safi, "Larkīōn kī Jazīrah," in *Rāt kī Shahādah* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 173.

²⁸See, Ibn-e-Safi, "Joṅk kī Wāpsī [Return of the Leech]," in *Singhī in Action*, vol. 12 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 88. Moreover, see Imran's comment regarding the pant of Naynā, the cowboy girl, in Ibn-e-Safi, "Bē Āawāz Sayyārah [Silent Satellite]," 265.

²⁹Rashid Ashraf, *Ibn-i Ṣafī: Shakhṣīyyat aur Fann [Ibn-e-Safi: Personality and Work]* (Karachi: Atlantis Publications, 2016), 132.

passages quoted by Ashraf are plausible enough to support his argument,³⁰ he could have produced a more solid argument by analyzing the statements Safi held regarding different religions. Ashraf seems right in his judgment that the basic aim of Safi was not the preaching of Islam. The existence of religious dialogues in his novels does not make him a *mawlawī* or *mullah* (titles for an Islamic religious scholar). Safi did not get any formal religious training.³¹ Therefore, most of his opinions were either the results of his own understanding or personal experiences. In what follows, his views regarding Christianity and Judaism are analyzed. Moreover, this analysis is also limited to the views disseminated in *Imrān Series*.

2.1. Christianity

The British invasion of the Indian Subcontinent played an important role in creating rifts between the Christians and the Muslims. As the Muslims had ruled India, they were destined to be suppressed by their Christian lords.³² Safi was a keen observer, a deep thinker, and a creative man who started pondering over the intensity of such matters from his childhood. The Ewing Christian College provided him with the opportunity to learn from both Eastern and Western teachers as well as introduced him to the intricacies involved in the Christian and the Muslim worldviews. Thus, several years later, when he drafted his *Dāktar Du'āgō* (Doctor Beadsman), he found no difficulty in expounding the impact of missionary institutions on the Muslim children. Presenting Ali Imran-the hero of his *Imrān Series*, as a student of a missionary school, he wrote:

His mother wanted to teach him the (Islamic rituals of) prayers and fasting. His father admitted him to a mission school...

The antithesis of mission school and home education entangled him in mental perplexities.

Mother insists: Allah is one. HE neither begot anyone, nor was he begotten.

Mission school asserts: Jesus Christ is the son of God.

He was intelligent since his childhood. When he wants to argue or try to repeat the saying of his mother at school, he becalmed by the scolding. When, at home, he would express the praise of Jesus Christ, his mother slapped him.³³

³⁰For example, Ashraf pointed towards the dialogue of Imran by which he tried to justify the drinking (of alcohol) of one of his companions. See, *ibid.*, 128-29.

³¹As for as the researcher knows he was not trained in a Madrassa or any other religious institute.

³²For example, according to a historian, William Wilson Hunter (1840-1900), British rule proved destructive for Muslims. He argued that in Bengal, only 92 Muslims were appointed at 2111 posts. He added that the policies of British rulers ruined the Muslims of Bengal. See, W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans* (London: Trubner and Company, 1876), 165.

³³Ibn-e-Safi, "Dāktar Du'āgō [Doctor Beadsman]," in *Dāktar Du'āgō [Doctor Beadsman]*, vol. 34 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 5.

The above quotation is not just the representation of a mere dogmatic difference between Islam and Christianity. Rather, it is an attempt to point out the problems a child can face while confronting multiple worldviews. It reflects the issues a teacher experiences in educating the students. It elucidates the relevance of a particular religion in the moral and spiritual growth of a person. However, this does not mean that Safi was an opponent of religious pluralism. In fact, following the *Qur'ānic* rule of “no compulsion in religion,”³⁴ he advocated a pluralistic-humanitarian-society, a society that could respect the religious views of others. The dialogue between Ali Imran and Durdānah, a character of his novel, regarding Mrs. Hardy, a Christian neighbor who raised Durdānah, is a case in point. Durdānah said: “I can never forget Mrs. Hardy! that great lady! who reared me like mothers. Even bore my expenses and never ever forced me to embrace the Christian religion.”³⁵ The way Safi drafted this dialogue indicates the reverence he had for both the Christians and the Muslims. Not only did he express the religious feelings of a Muslim for whom the “color of Allah is better than all”³⁶ but also pointed out the respect of neighbor taught by the Holy Bible to a faithful Christian. Not to mention, besides “love of God”, the highest virtue for a Christian is “love of neighbor.”³⁷ It shows that for Safi, humanity was a shared element among the adherents of the world religions. He also tries to give equal importance to the adherents of other religions and it is not for his heroes only, but also a feature of his villains. In his *Khūn kē Pyāsē (Bloodthirsty)*, when Ali Imran demanded compensation for Jakob Masih, a Christian clerk who was injured by the adversaries, Theresia, a villainess of Safi's many novels, showed her affirmation to pay him without any hesitation.³⁸

He created the character of Joseph, an African Christian who became the right-hand of Imran. Even though Joseph was a Christian and Imran was a Muslim, not a single line in his eighty-nine subsequent novels could point out any sort of religious or racial discrimination of both. However, Joseph, as an addicted drinker, remained under the criticism of Imran on religious grounds. Imran thought that wine, beer, or any other form of alcohol was forbidden in Christianity. Therefore, he criticized the Christian community regarding the legality of alcohol. However, this criticism was also free from discrimination. For example, when during a mission, Joseph could not find alcohol, he turned towards Imran saying:

“Your religion is very good boss as it saved you from this (addiction).”

³⁴al-Baqarah 2: 256.

³⁵Ibn-e-Safi, "Purasrār Chīkhēṇ [Mysterious Screams]," 196.

³⁶al-Baqarah :138

³⁷ Mark 12: 30-31

³⁸Ibn-e-Safi, "Khūn kē Piyāsē [Blood Thirsty]," in *Shakrāl kē Nāsūr [Fistula of Shakral]*, vol. 1 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 117.

(Imran replies:) "It is the matter of obedience my dear.... Jesus Christ even forbade the consumption of meat... but you (as a community) ignored his command and celebrate his birthday by uncorking the bottles of champagne"

Suddenly Joseph started blubbering.

"Listen to me fully." Imran spoke while planting his hand on his back. "many of us also do not obey our Lord and drink openly."

"I did not cry out of your sarcasm... I am crying because he got hanged for us, but we do not follow his commands."³⁹

This dialogue between Joseph and Imran draws attention to a number of points: The very first point is Joseph's admiration of Islam. Although, he was a loyal Christian, when he found a characteristic of Islam⁴⁰ which for him was good, he admired it; Another point raised in this dialogue is Safi's thinking about the prohibition of alcohol in Christianity. It should be noted that it is not the only place where he propagated his views regarding the illegality of alcohol in Christianity. In several other novels of his *Imrān Series*, he also talked about this prohibition.⁴¹ Consumption of alcohol is strictly prohibited in Islam, however, among Christian scholars, it is a disputed issue. Leaving aside the Christian view about alcohol, Safi presented it as an established fact.⁴² He did not provide any argument or reference to prove his statement.⁴³

This third major feature of the dialogue is Safi's criticism of both the Muslims and the Christians. He targeted the followers of both religions signifying that although they were aware of the teachings of their religions, they were not willing to surrender their will before their Lord. It is clear from his writings that he did not criticize any religion, such as Islam, Christianity, or Judaism. What he criticized was the attitude of adherents of these religions. For example, during a mission, Imran was playing the role of a Christian. Ghazala, the heroine of his *Khushbū kā Ḥamlah* (Attack of Aroma), wished to marry him. However, Imran reminded her that he was a Christian whereas she was a Muslim. Imran's answer made her say:

"Oh God save me; I did forget it.... But could not you embrace Islam.!"

³⁹Ibn-e-Safi, "Jangal kī Shahriyyat [Citizenship of Jungle]," 350.

⁴⁰It should be taken into account that alcohol is strictly banned in Islam. See, Al-Qu'rān, al-Mā'idah 5:90.

⁴¹For example, see Ibn-e-Safi, "Āag kā Dā'irah [Ring of Fire]," 135; Ibn-e-Safi, "Khūnrēz Tašādum [The Bloody Encounter]," in *Singhī kī Wāpsī [Return of the Singhi]*, vol. 19 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 208; Ibn-e-Safi, "Bē Āawāz Sayyārah [Silent Satellite]," 200.

⁴²Perhaps Safi took his cue from both the Old and New Testament which discourage the use of alcoholic drinks. See, Proverbs 23:20; Isaiah 5:22; Luke 1:15; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Timothy 3:8.

⁴³To elucidate a difficult term or to provide any cross reference, Safi would use footnotes in his novels. For example, see Ibn-e-Safi, "Bē Āawāz Sayyārah [Silent Satellite]," 223..

(Imran replies) "What is the benefit when there is no difference between you and me. Neither you offer your prayer, nor I go to Church..."⁴⁴

This dialogue provides another example of his criticism of the religious attitude of the Christians and the Muslims. He pointed out that people, whether Christians or Muslims, were giving up their religion. They did not have an understanding of the purpose of their creation.⁴⁵ This is what St. George (d.303) referred to as the "dragon within"⁴⁶ and the Holy Prophet (SAW) as the "Satan that circulates in the veins of a person"⁴⁷ Perhaps that is why Safi suggests his readers to become honest at individual level.

Interestingly that although Joseph would think of himself as a slave of Imran, he would never force him to convert to Islam. On the other hand, Imran showed due respect to his adherence to Christianity.⁴⁸ Similar was the case of Joseph. Occasionally, he also admired Imran's loyalty to Allah.⁴⁹ Moreover, it is clear from Safi's writings that he was not aiming to convert people to Islam, but his basic intention was to promote the culture of brotherhood, peace, and harmony among his readers. For example, once when Joseph found that Jameson, another companion of Imran, is after a Christian girl, Joseph asked him about his ambitions. Jameson shares that if she replied in affirmation, he will marry her after converting her to Islam. His answer makes Joseph indignant. Consequently, he says:

You bastard...! Joseph enraged while raising his fist.

"(how do you) convert a Christian into Muslim"

"Ok.... Ok... I will do civil marriage (Jameson replied)"⁵⁰

It points significantly towards the approach Safi adopted in his writings. He was aware of the feelings of a loyal Christian. He knew that similar to the followers of other religions,

⁴⁴Ibn-e-Safi, "Khushbū kā Ḥamlah [Attack of Aroma]," in *Bāba Sag Parast [Old Dog-worshiper]*, vol. 28 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 62.

⁴⁵Both Christian (see, 1 Samuel 12:24, John 17:4) and Muslim (Al-Qu'rān, Adh-Dhāriyāt 51:56) sources stress on the worship of God and regard it one of the purposes of the creation of the humankind.

⁴⁶St. George warns that there is a dragon in human beings which must be slayed by them. However, he regrets, it is the dragon that slays them. For details, see Whitall N. Perry, "The Dragon that Swallowed St. George," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 10, no. 3 (1976).

⁴⁷According to the Holy Prophet (SAW) "Satan circulates in the human body as blood does." It can plot evil in the minds of people. See, Muslim bin Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Mūsulim* (Beirut Dār ūl-Kūtūb al-Ilmiyyah, 1991), 1712.

⁴⁸Ibn-e-Safi, "Jangal kī Shahriyyat [Citizenship of Jungle]," 227.

⁴⁹For example, during a mission, Imran says to Joseph that God always take care of his difficulties. Joseph replies that "you trust only in Him, that is why He helps you." See, Ibn-e-Safi, "Larztī Lakīrēṇ [Wavering Stripes]," 299.

⁵⁰Ibn-e-Safi, "Bamboo Castle," in *Bēgam X-2 [Mrs. X-2]*, vol. 23 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 39.

it is also tough for a Christian to tolerate the conversion of a fellow Christian. Moreover, this dialogue also indicates that Safi intentionally created this scenario to make his readers realize that they should always respect the feeling of the followers of other religions and must remember that “there is no compulsion in religion.” Thus, it can be concluded that through his characters, Safi successfully demonstrated how it is possible to treat other religious fold with respect while remaining loyal to a particular religion.

2.2. Judaism

In comparison to Christianity, Safi wrote very little on Judaism in his *Imrān Series*. The context in which he was writing was highly critical of the Jews. The majority of the Muslims were against the Jews. They thought the Jews forgot the time when they were living with the Muslims in Spain and elsewhere. Not to mention that the time the Jews spent under the Muslim rule is considered as their “golden age.”⁵¹ In Ismail Faruqi's (1921-1986) words:

After centuries of Greek, Roman and Byzantine (Christian) oppression and persecution, the Jews of the Near East, of North Africa, of Spain and Persia, looked upon the Islamic state as liberator...Indeed, Judaism and its Hebrew language developed their 'golden age' under the aegis of Islam. Hebrew acquired its first grammar, the Torah its jurisprudence, Hebrew letters their lyrical poetry, and Hebrew philosophy found its first Aristotelian, Musa ibn Maymun (Maimonides) (c. 1135/8-1204), whose thirteen precepts, couched in Arabic first, defined the Jewish creed and identity.⁵²

However, the Jewish takeover of Palestine, in 1948, regarded by the Muslims as one of the worst examples of brutality the modern world ever witnessed. Zionists successfully assured most of the Jewry that the control of the state of Israel was a part of the Divine scheme.⁵³ The religious element involved in this takeover intensified the whole issue. Thus, writing something about Jewish tradition was a challenging task for a Muslim of the 20th century.

It is clear from the writings of Safi like other fellow Muslims; he was not in favor of Zionism. He believed that Zionists promoted hatred and enmity between the Muslims and the Jews. The first case he put forward was of Palestine. The following dialogue between Joseph and Jameson points out that for Safi it was the connivance of both Zionists and

⁵¹David Bamberger, *Judaism and the World's Religions* (New Jersey: Behrman House, 1987), 86.

⁵²Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Islam And Other Faiths* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 87.

⁵³It should be considered that most of the Orthodox Jews were not in favor of the establishment of the new state of Israel. They thought that it must be achieved through the divine intervention only. Thus, they went against Zionism. For details, see Dana Evan Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 16; Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942-1948* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

some “white men” who purposefully shaped this whole issue. Joseph who was playing the role of a guru was questioned by Jameson:

'But guru.... how to resolve the matter of Israel...?' Jameson said while sitting beside a woman.

'What I can say...!' Joseph spoke hoarsely. 'there is no solution for self-created issues. Ask those bastards why they did not plant the expelled Jews of Germany to Canada or Australia where populations were limited, and fertile lands were unlimited.... why did they stuff them (Jews) in the deserts of Palestine.'⁵⁴

The above dialogue gives the reason that the forced settlement of German Jews in Palestine was not justified. Since pre-Hitler Germany was a tough place for Jews to live. German Jewry was forced to live in Ghettos, banned to enter certain cities, and bound to wear certain clothes.⁵⁵ This situation, for them, did not change even after the death of Martin Luther (1483-1546), the founder of the Protestant movement.⁵⁶ His followers also tried hard to get rid of the Jews. As a result, the Jews were banned from the entire country in 1573.⁵⁷ The post-Hitler era provided them a chance to find a place they could call their home. Consequently, Zionism emerged to occupy Palestine.

Safi argued that it would be better for both the Jews and the Muslims if the German Jewry was remade in Canada or Australia. However, he overlooked that it was not the aim of Zionists to be settled in Canada, Australia, or elsewhere. They wanted to establish their territory in Palestine for which sometimes they killed, murdered, and expelled the peaceful Muslims.⁵⁸ Another point about which this dialogue draws attention is Joseph's thinking that “there is no solution for self-created issues.” It shows that the state of Israel, for Safi, was a self-created issue. Therefore, he would think that there was no solution for it. It seems that he was right in his judgment because seventy-one years passed and yet there were no signs of peace in Palestine. Even the United Nations did little to resolve this matter.

The issue of Israel was not the only reason that made Safi write against the Zionism. He also thought that the goal of the Zionists was not just limited to the conquest of Palestine, but they were aiming to conquer the whole world. In his novels, he referred to certain Orthodox Christian organizations which were working against Zionists because

⁵⁴Ibn-e-Safi, "Bamboo Castle," 38.

⁵⁵Cecil Roth, *The Jewish Contribution To Civilization* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers,, 1940), 23.

⁵⁶For example, on November 10, 1938, the very day of Luther's birthday, many Synagogues were burned down by the Lutherans. See, M.L. Brown, *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 2015), 105.

⁵⁷Paul Johnson, *A History Of The Jews* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 242.

⁵⁸The massacre of peaceful Muslims at Deir Yassin, in 1948, is considered as a symbol of the destruction of whole Palestine. For details, see Matthew Hogan, "The 1948 Massacre at Deir Yassin Revisited," *Historian* 63, no. 2 (2001): 1; Donald E. Wagner and Walter T. Davis, *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014), 206.

they were aware of their destructive policies.⁵⁹ He writes that by controlling the economy of the world, Zionists are trying to suppress both the Christians and the Muslims. They are putting every effort to spread the philosophies that are intoxicating the non-Zionist minds.⁶⁰ However, Safi was not against the Jewish community as a whole. Through his novels, he also talked about those Jews who wanted peace in the world. For example, Jaffrey, a Jewish character of one of his novels, expresses:

I truly hate Zionists tactics. Many Jews, like me, have their faith in mutual harmony.! we do not dream of a Zionist takeover of this world. Moreover, after spending so many days in your country, I am in love with Islamic values!⁶¹

This dialogue is not just an example of Jewish abhorrence for Zionism, but it also contains the message of the Jewry working to bring peace and harmony in the world. Moreover, as this dialogue indicates, although Jaffrey was a Jew like Joseph was a Christian and Imran a Muslim, he showed admiration for Islam. Indeed, Safi's dialogues teach how it is possible to create a peaceful society.

Moreover, another feature of his *Imrān Series* is the warnings it contains about those who are spreading hatred among the followers of different religions for their personal gain. The dialogue between an Italian taxi driver and Jameson is a clear example of it. When Jameson and Joseph engaged him for a ride, he said: "If you people are tourists then beware of the deceivers. The Jews destroyed Italy. I guess you are the Arabs.... Senor...!" "Nope.... Persians.!" Jameson said. "Then it is all right. Actually, The Jews are not that bad. I like Jewish girls very much. Truly, they take tourists to the heavens."⁶²

This dialogue shows how a taxi driver, tried to benefit from the Jewish-Arab conflict. Considering Jameson and Joseph as the Arabs, he spoke against Jews to earn their sympathy. However, when he came to know that they were not Arabs, he started talking about the beauty of Jewish girls. Thus, it can be said that through his novels, Safi wrote against Zionists but to some extent, he also tried to alleviate the increasing gap between the Jews and the Muslims in the present era of hate and violence.

3. Conclusion

To understand the religious views preached and promoted by Ibn-e-Safi, this essay analyzed one hundred and twenty novels of his *Imrān Series*. It shows that he started writing detective novels not just to build his professional career but to aim at teaching people the reverence of law. The concept of law according to him was not just limited to

⁵⁹For example, see the dialogue between Mrs. Gohan and Imran in Ibn-e-Safi, "Buzdil Sūrmā [The Coward Knight]," 175.

⁶⁰For example, he claims that "the current 'Hippieism' is the result of Zionist efforts" See, Ibn-e-Safi, "Dast-i Qadhā [Hand of Death]," 210.

⁶¹Ibn-e-Safi, "Ashtray House," 308.

⁶²Ibn-e-Safi, "Operation Double Cross," in *Addlāwā*, vol. 22 of *Imrān Series* (Lahore: Asrār Publications, n.d.), 8.

the man-made rules but also referred to the Divine commandments. Apart from Islam, Christianity is the most discussed religion in his writings. He advocates the forging of positive relationships between the Christians and the Muslims. Without providing any convincing argument, he criticizes the Christian Law with respect to alcohol and meat. He claims that Jesus Christ prohibited the use of meat and alcohol. Similarly, on a religious basis, he also condemns those Muslims who consume alcohol.

He maintains that Zionism is a destructive movement that promotes hatred between the Muslims and the Jews. He advised the adherents of all the faiths to discourage such movements. Nevertheless, he asserts that there are many Jews who want peace in this world just like the Muslims and the Christians. However, there are certain groups active in their struggle to discourage their positive relationships.

Safi was writing in an era when the Indian-Muslim scholarship was predominantly against Christians and Jews. The British invasion of India and Zionist conquest of Palestine were the main reasons behind it. However, through his writings, he tried to promote peace and harmony among the people of different faiths. At the same time, he also criticized those who destroyed the peace of society. Thus, the study of his novels supports multiculturalism, coexistence, tolerance and helps to identify elements disturbing the peace of society.

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